

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1216
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY SANA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DJIBOUTI 1320

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDEV, PINS, PGOV, ASEC, DJ
SUBJ: RUMORS OF CABINET CHANGES

REF: DJIBOUTI 1319

1. SUMMARY. DESPITE THE SEEMINGLY GENERAL FRANK SELF-CRITICISM OF THE PRESIDENT'S END OF RAMADAN ADDRESS, IT APPEARS THAT THE AFAR PUBLIC AND POLITICIANS ARE HIGHLY DISSATISFIED WITH ITS IMPLICATIONS. RUMORS OF CABINET CHANGES ARE IN THE AIR, AND THE AFARS MAY BE AFRAID THAT THEIR REPRESENTATIVES WILL BE THE MOST DIRECTLY AFFECTED. FUTURE PLANS ARE STILL UNDECIDED FOR PRIME MINISTER ABDALLAH KAMIL WHOSE DEPARTURE FROM THE CABINET WOULD LEAVE A VOID WHICH THE PRESIDENT MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO FILL ADEQUATELY.

2. RAMADAN IN THE MUSLIM WORLD IS A TIME OF REFLECTION AND
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RENEWAL. TO THE PIOUS PRESIDENT OF DJIBOUTI (NO ONE REMEMBERS HOW MANY TIMES HE HAS MADE THE HADJ TO MECCA), THIS YEAR'S RAMADAN WAS ESPECIALLY MEANINGFUL. ALTHOUGH HE HAS NOT MADE KNOWN TO ANYONE IN THE CABINET HIS DECISIONS, IT IS EVIDENT THAT CERTAIN MINISTERS ARE FALLING SWIFTLY INTO ECLIPSE. THESE INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING: MINISTER OF EDUCATION HASSAN HUSSEIN BANABILA (ARAB), MINISTER OF HEALTH MOHAMED AHMED ISSA

(CALLED CHEIKO) (AFAR), AND MINISTER FOR PORT AFFAIRS, AHMED YOUSSEF HOUMED (AFAR).

3. THE DESCENT OF MINISTER OF EDUCATION BANABILA HAS BEEN RAPID. A WELL-CONSIDERED EDUCATOR, HE HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN HEAVILY CRITICIZED FROM BOTH WITHIN THE MINISTRY AND BY STUDENTS FOR HIS SINGLE-MINDED PURSUIT OF ARABIZATION. BECAUSE OF CONCERNS AT TOO RAPID INTRODUCTION OF ARAB LEARNING, THE MINISTER HAS BEEN AT COMPLETE ODDS WITH THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF EDUCATION ABDULLAH SOULEIMAN, WHO IS WELL CONSIDERED BY THE FRENCH BECAUSE OF HIS EFFORTS TO RETAIN FRENCH STANDARDS. BECAUSE OF THE EDUCATION MINISTER'S LACK OF MANAGERIAL EXPERIENCE, IT APPEARS THAT ADEQUATE PREPARATIONS FOR THE REOPENING OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN DJIBOUTI THIS MONTH WERE NOT MADE. HOUSING IS NOT AVAILABLE FOR TEACHERS, SCHOOLROOMS HAVE NOT BEEN PREPARED. BOOKS ARE UNAVAILABLE. THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF HAS TAKEN CHARGE IN THE MINISTRY, AND TWO EXTRAORDINARY CABINET MEETINGS, 6 AND 7 SEPTEMBER, WERE SPECIALLY CALLED TO LOOK INTO THE EDUCATION MESS.

4. AS FOR THE PORT, THERE APPEARS TO BE LITTLE TO BE SAID FOR IT. RIVEN BY ETHNIC RIVALRIES CAUSED BY THE GOVERNMENT'S DESIRES TO HAVE PARITY BETWEEN THE TWO MAJOR ETHNIC GROUPS AND SOMEWHAT DELAPIDATED BY LACK OF INVESTMENT IN RECENT YEARS, THE PORT IS IN POOR STRAITS. THE MINISTER FOR PORT AFFAIRS AHMED YOUSSEF, ALREADY DEMOTED TO THAT POSITION FROM HIS PREVIOUS POSITION AS MINISTER OF HEALTH, IS SUSPECTED OF CLOSE ATTACHMENT

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TO AFAR SEDITIONIST GROUPS, AND HAS SPENT LITTLE TIME AT THE JOB SINCE THE CABINET CHANGE OF 5 FEBRUARY 1978.

5. MINISTER OF HEALTH "CHEIKO" IS A FLAMBOYANT POLITICIAN BUT HAS FEW IF ANY MANAGEMENT SKILLS. THE CONTINUING DECLINE OF THE PUBLIC HOSPITAL IN DJIBOUTI IS PROBABLY NOT HIS FAULT; IT SHOWS EVERY BIT ITS SEVENTY YEARS OF AGE. HOWEVER, THE MOUNTING COMPLAINTS ABOUT SERVICES, OR RATHER THE LACK OF SERVICES, OBVIOUSLY CALLS FOR SOMEONE OF MUCH HIGHER CALIBER THAN MINISTER CHEIKO TO MANAGE THE AFFAIR.

6. THE FUTURE ROLE OF PRIME MINISTER ABDALLAH KAMIL IS DISTURBINGLY UNCLEAR. DURING BRIEF MEETING WITH HIM ON 7 SEPTEMBER, CHARGE FOUND KAMIL EXCEPTIONALLY PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE LOCAL SCENE. KAMIL AVOWED THAT HE FOUND THE PRESIDENT'S 3 SEPTEMBER SPEECH "A DECLARATION OF WAR," AND A PROVOCATION TO THE AFARS. ASKED ABOUT RUMORS OF IMPENDING CABINET CHANGES, KAMIL SAID THAT HE HAD NOT BEEN CONSULTED BY THE PRESIDENT, AND THAT HE DID NOT KNOW WHETHER THE PRESIDENT WOULD ASK HIM TO PARTICIPATE IN SELECTION OF NEW CABINET OR WHETHER HE HIMSELF WOULD BE IN THE NEXT CABINET.

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7. WHEN PRESSED ON HIS ASSERTION THAT THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH WAS A SERIOUS PROVOCATION TO THE AFARS, KAMIL FINALLY EXPLAINED THAT THE PRESIDENT'S CALL FOR NATIONAL UNITY WAS PHRASED IN SUCH A WAY THAT IT APPEARED TO THE AFARS THAT IT MEANT THAT THEY WOULD BE OBLIGED TO FOLLOW THE SOMALI-ISSAS OR BE CRUSHED. KAMIL ALSO NOTED THAT THE FRENCH TEXT WHICH CHARGE HAD USED FOR HIS UNDERSTANDING OF SPEECH WAS NOT NECESSARILY THE SAME AS THE PRESIDENT'S ORIGINAL SOMALI LANGUAGE PUBLIC SPEECH. KAMIL'S MOST ASTONISHING ADMISSION WAS THAT HE HAD NOT READ THE FRENCH TEXT.

8. COMMENT. IT APPEARS FAIRLY CERTAIN THAT DJIBOUTI IS ON THE EDGE OF ANOTHER CABINET CRISIS, ONE THAT CANNOT BE BLAMED ON ITS NEIGHBORS AND PERHAPS NOT EVEN ON THE PRESIDENT. THE ESSENTIAL PROBLEM IS THAT OF COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO ETHNIC GROUPS. DURING THE RAMADAN THERE IS USUALLY LITTLE PUBLIC LIFE. PEOPLE TEND TO STAY AT HOME OR AMONG FRIENDS, WITH
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THE RESULT THAT THE TENDENCY TO VIEW ISSUES IN THE MOST NARROW SECULAR INTERESTS BECOME EXAGERRATED. ANOTHER IMPORTANT FACTOR IS THE INCREASING EVIDENCE THAT THE ROLES OF PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER ARE INCOMPATIBLE. THE PRIME MINISTER SHOULD BE AT HOME ACTING AT LEAST AS THE ARBITER PERMITTED UNDER DJIBOUTI'S VAGUE CONSTITUTIONAL PROCEEDURES. IN DJIBOUTI, AS IN MOST OF AFRICA, THE FOREIGN MINISTER IS ITINERANT DEALING WITH THE VARIOUS INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS. WITH NOW A FEW MONTHS EXPERIENCE, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE JOB WHICH KAMIL PREFERS IS THAT OF FOREIGN MINISTER. HE CONTINUALLY COMPLAINS THAT THE PRESIDENT IS ALWAYS INTERFERING IN THE DAY-TO-DAY MANAGEMENT OF MINISTERIAL CONCERNS. HOWEVER, BY HIS EXTREMELY FREQUENT ABSENCES, KAMIL LEAVES THE PRESIDENT WITH LITTLE CHOICE BUT TO CONCERN HIMSELF WITH THE FUNCTIONING OF EVERYDAY BUSINESS OF GOVERNMENT.

9. FURTHER COMMENT. ASSUMING THAT THE UNWRITTEN RULE THAT THE DJIBOUTI PRIME MINISTER MUST BE AN AFAR IS FOLLOWED, THERE ARE REALLY NO OTHER SERIOUS CANDIDATES FOR KAMIL'S PRIME MINISTER POSITION. THE PRESIDENT REMAINS RESOLUTELY OPPOSED TO A RE-ENTRY OF AHMED DINI INTO THE GOVERNMENT. THE NAME OF FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE COLONIAL GOVERNING COUNCIL, ALI AREF, SOMETIMES COMES UP. HOWEVER, FEW PEOPLE TRUST HIM, AND HE HAS NO ORGANIZED FOLLOWING. IN RECENT DAYS, THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE, ALI YOUSSEUF, HAS BEEN ADVANCED AS A CANDIDATE FOR THE PRIME MINISTER. ALTHOUGH AN AFAR, ALI YOUSSEUF IS CONSIDERED BY MOST AFARS AS A TRAITOR BECAUSE OF HIS LEANINGS TOWARD MOGADISCIO AND SPONSORSHIP OF ALI MIRAH. THE REMAINING AFAR WITH A BROAD REPUTATION IS SENATOR BARKAT; HOWEVER, HE IS UNIVERSALLY REGARDED AS A PLAYBOY AND WITH NO DECERNIBLE INTEREST IN TAKING ON ANY RESPONSIBILITY WHICH MIGHT ENDANGER HIS CONTINUING NON-VOTING MEMBERSHIP IN THE FRENCH SENATE. ALL OF THE ARGUMENTS LEAD BACK NOW TO ABDALLAH
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KAMIL. HE HAS TWO ALTERNATIVES IF HE WISHES TO PROVIDE APPROPRIATE LEADERSHIP. HE MUST EITHER GIVE UP ONE OF HIS TWO IMPORTANT ROLES OR APPOINT SOMEONE WHO CAN TRAVEL FOR HIM IN THE FOREIGN MINISTER FUNCTION. KAMIL'S THIRD POSITION (MINISTRY OF DEFENSE) IS A PRE-EMPTIVE ONE, TO PREVENT IT GOING TO AN ISSA AND TO PROVIDE CABINET SYMMETRY. WE KNOW THAT HE IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS OF HIS VARIOUS RESPONSIBILITIES AND WE EXPECT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HIS VIEWS IN THE COMING DAYS.

CLARKE

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